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THE
VALUE OF FEAR

A Fragment of Autobiography

Remorse

Timor Domini odit malum

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PREFATORY NOTE

The other day I was in a law court watching a case in which one man was denouncing another. There was only one person sitting between them, and as the denounced man listened to his denouncer he fidgeted uneasily and clenched his fist. No doubt the denunciation was exaggerated, but enough of it was true to inflict an indelible brand.

When the denounced man was a little child of eight I had played with him a game which I had called "Furies," I pretending to represent those indefatigable pursuers. The game of a few minutes had been a foreshadowing of what had turned into a hideous reality prolonged through years. Unrestrained by fear, the child, grown man, had aroused furies of unglutted vengeance and provided ample material for newspaper purveyors of scandal.

Our acts our angels are for good or ill,
Our fatal shadows which walk by us still.

I, too, like him, had been pursued till
I turned. The following fragment of
actual autobiography is meant to
illustrate this idea of Pursuit—pursuit
by the “Hound of Heaven,” from which,
could we see deeply enough, we should
probably find that no guilty soul ever
escapes.

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I. BOYHOOD.

SOMEONE has said that all sincere autobiography is interesting. This is an attempt to see if it is so.

I was born at Clifton in April, 1863. My father was at that time a major in the Indian army and absent in India. My mother was from South Africa, and of a rather melancholy disposition. He, on the contrary, was always optimistic and cheery. The springs of this optimism lay for the most part in his simple but profound religious faith. He was not in the least disturbed by any currents of modern thought, and would have been happy among Cromwell's Ironsides.

When I was twelve months old my mother took me out to India, where I remained three years. The only distinct recollections I have of it are picking up the skins of snakes in the garden and lying in a tent listening to a band. My mother came home

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with me in 1867, leaving my father in India. In the autumn of the same year he was sent on the Abyssinian Expedition, and came home very ill, after the hardships of it, in 1868.

He left us again in 1870 to return to his duties in India. Just before he did so, I remember distinctly his telling me the story of Sennacherib and Hezekiah. The Crystal Palace at that time, much better appointed than now, was a veritable wonderland to us children. Unfortunately the sight of the sweets laid out on the stalls roused my thievish propensities. I often used to snatch a stick of chocolate and rush away.

Little thief as I was, however, I was very susceptible to music and hymns. The hymn "Sun of my soul, thou Saviour dear," especially made a deep impression on my mind, and is connected with the evening sun shining on the glass dome of the Crystal Palace. In August, 1871, we went to Brighton. Here on Christmas

Day I remember thumping my sister on the back in a fit of temper and being sent up to a top room with a little green dumpy, "Pilgrim's Progress," as my companion. About this time religious circles were thinking much of the Last Day, and I remember being taken to hear lectures on the subject by the then famous "prophet" Baxter. The sight of a red glow in the sky often filled me with dread, and I used to dream of the Dies Irae.

My mother used to sometimes whip me severely. This only roused rage and resentment, and I don't think did any good. I remember writing "Mummy-devil" on my slate.

In May, 1872, my mother went to rejoin my father in India, and I was left with some friends of hers at W—, being sent to a private school. It was an immoral place managed by two partners, one a harsh man, and the other himself a corrupter of boys and an editor of Greek plays. Filth and tyranny of all kinds used to prevail

here, and the language was vile. Here, too, I used to steal sometimes out of the boys' lockers, sometimes out of the basket of the sweet-man who used to come into the playground on half-holidays.

One day in the spring of 1874, being irritated, I ran at a boy in a rage, having an open knife in my hand. It penetrated the lobe of his ear and went a little way into his head; fortunately no further.

At the end of 1874 my father, then a Colonel, came home for good. He was as above mentioned, a deeply religious man, and I had the advantage of growing up under his influence. It was a good thing for me that he was at home during my boyhood, for I always hated petticoat government.

In September, 1875, during a holiday at Ramsgate, I being then twelve years old, fell seriously in love. Her name was Agnes K——, and she had deep blue eyes. In the evenings we used to walk on the moon-lit promenade;

I remember pointing to an enamoured couple on a bench and saying, "Agnes, suppose they saw us like that!" One morning, September 14th, 1875, I found she had suddenly departed. I flung myself on the bed in a passion of tears, and then went out on the sands with a heavy heart that could not be consoled by Punch-and-Judy shows or nigger minstrels.

In January, 1876, I was sent to a school at Gosport to prepare for the Royal Navy, for which I eventually proved too short-sighted. Here I used to spend my Sundays with an uncle, a retired naval officer. He was a kind-hearted man, but dictatorial and domineering in his outward manner. I was, in his opinion, too much of a book-worm, and he used to rouse me out of an arm-chair and the perusal of the "Sunday at Home" on Sunday afternoons by saying in a gruff voice, "Now, C! go and pick up sticks for the fire!"

In the summer holidays of this year

I fell deeply in love with my cousin, a fair-complexioned girl a year older than myself. She made me a little wreath of larkspur, which, with a lock of her hair, I kept for a long time in my Bible.

The next year (1877) I went to a large public school, and from this time I date the real dawn of moral consciousness. Sensual impulses were strong in me, and the necessity of controlling them drove me to seek supernatural aid. Public opinion is nowhere so tyrannical as at a large school, and I soon found myself a social pariah because I would not give way to it. It was a custom in my form for the younger boys to steal coals for the class-room fire, and I was severely thrashed by the whole form, or most of them, because I refused to do so. I did not tell them the real reason for my refusal, *i.e.* the fear of God, and was simply regarded as an "obstinate pig." On another occasion the form master had set a lesson which the form con-

sidered too long, and therefore agreed not to learn beyond a certain point. I learnt the whole lesson, gained a good many places, and another thrashing to boot. Doubtless there was something priggish about this, but the lesson of learning to stand alone is invaluable, and I am profoundly grateful to my Puritan father, from whom I learned it. I am afraid it is no exaggeration to say that unnatural vice was a matter of almost daily occurrence in the school. It is true that the boys had cubicles of their own, and might not leave them after ten o'clock at night, but that did not prevent the practice of vice in the day time. There was morning and evening chapel, and the headmaster preached on Sundays, but not one sermon remained in my memory. The master of my form was a weak nervous man, who was quite incapable of managing a set of rough and boisterous boys. I have heard him exclaim in a tearful and quavering voice "Boys! I never expected this of you!" an appeal

which was probably greeted with a yell of delighted derision. Periodical confirmations were held at the school, but I considerably doubt their beneficial effect, except perhaps on some of the most senior boys. In my own dormitory the confirmees on their return from the ceremony were greeted with the shout, "Here come the saints!" In fact, though the school was visited by grandees, and occasionally by Royalty on speech-days, it would have made a good third with Sodom and Gomorrah.

A good deal of bullying also went on. One fine summer evening a bully came to my cubicle and thrashed me with a cricket stump, so that it was painful to lift my arms afterwards, for no reason that I could see except personal dislike. On another occasion I found a notice affixed to the door of my cubicle to this effect, "A prayer-meeting will be held here at — o'clock." The character of the prayer-meeting may be better imagined than described.

Altogether things were being made too warm for me. I had been sent to the school to prepare for the army, and it is not very surprising that the thought arose in my mind, "Can a true Christian lawfully be a soldier?" I had a real scruple on the subject, but I doubt if the scruple would have taken definite form, had I not been so profoundly miserable. Fancy a boy of 15 finding comfort in the verse in Job as I did: "Thou shalt forget thy misery and remember it as waters that pass away!" I told my father of this, and he, kind as he always was, consented to my leaving the school and going to a "crammer" in London to read for the India Civil Service.

In December, 1878, I left this scholastic purgatory, in which I had certainly learnt some useful lessons. It was a curious sight on the last day of term to see great hulking fellows of eighteen or so, leaning, each in his turn against a pillar in the school cloister, weeping profusely,

while a crowd of hero-worshippers cheered him. The cheers I got were few, and my tears still less.

The "crammer" I went to was a first-class one, and some of the lecturers were fellows of Oxford and Cambridge Colleges. The lecturer on English Literature drew my attention to Carlyle, and my first contact with the seer of Chelsea produced in me, as it doubtless has in thousands of cases, a veritable intellectual awakening. I was only just sixteen, but read "Sartor Resartus" and the Essays with the keenest delight. My father used to come to see me once a week, and I remember quoting to him a sentence from Carlyle's Essay on Novalis "Life is a disease of the soul; a working incited by passion," a grandiloquent phrase which I understand but little better now than I did then. The boarding-house I lived in was only two minutes away from Warwick Crescent, where Robert Browning then resided, and I often wish the poet and

not the philosopher, had been my first intellectual idol. For Carlyle's works began to shake the simple evangelical faith in which I had been brought up, and the shaking process begun by them was continued by coarser opponents of Christianity. Thus one day I took up on a bookstall Tom Paine's "Age of Reason," and I remember the shock it gave me to see Christ's birth from a Virgin compared to the birth of the Greek demigods. At the same time fleshly impulses were strong in me, and I found them terribly difficult to subdue. I had undertaken a class in a Sunday School, but the boys were ill-smelling and ill-behaved, and the Sunday afternoons were hot, so I gave this work up. At the same time I ceased attending Holy Communion with my father to his great grief. In short I began a process of "back-sliding" which lasted for eight years, from 1879 to 1887. In August, 1879, I went to Bonn to improve my knowledge of German, and stayed in the house

of an Irish Presbyterian minister who was missionary to the Jews there. Here the perusal of Goethe's "Faust" and of Shelley was not calculated to bring me back to my moorings, though the minister had pencilled the remark "horrible blasphemy" in the margin of the latter.

In the autumn of this year I fell in love with a girl staying in the same boarding-house. She had a brilliant complexion and was twenty-three, and I was sallow and sixteen, but that did not matter. We were honestly in love with each other, but I was not in the habit of keeping secrets, and on my telling my father, he promptly put a stop to the affair, and the girl left the boarding-house. She sent me back my love-letters with notes of interrogation appended to my declarations of undying devotion.

One of the classical lecturers at the "crammer's" I attended was an earnest-minded Baptist. One day after looking over an exercise, he turned to me and

asked me abruptly the question, "Have you found peace?" I found the question rather comic at the time, but have often felt grateful to him since. This lecturer was a brave man. It was his custom at the close of the summer session to tell his class, that if any of them at any time had difficulties about Christianity, he would be glad to help them, if he could. I think most of us cherished a secret respect for him, though his nick-name among us was "Sammy." The other classical lecturer was, in his leisure time, given to haunting Bohemian circles in Fleet Street. He unfortunately gave way to drink, and though he had taken a first-class at the university, degenerated into a publisher's hack and translator of lubricities.

One day about this time my father met General Gordon at a house close to our own, and talked with him about Abyssinia where they both had been. I have sometimes wondered if I, too, had seen this great soldier - saint,

whether the magnetic influence which certainly emanated from him might have stopped the process of degeneration which was slowly but surely going on in me. Not without struggles against it however; most young men feel what Frederick Myers describes,

“Oh the regret, the struggle, and the failing,
Oh! the days desolate and useless years!
Vows in the night so fierce and unavailing,—
Stings of my shame, and passion of my tears!”

Two other intellectual idols did me a considerable amount of harm, Matthew Arnold with his sceptical melancholy, and Heine with his cynicism. But to Heine's credit it must be remembered that he frankly acknowledged the folly of atheism and says in the preface of one of his latest works “I have returned to a personal God.”

I went up for the India Civil Service twice, and failed both times. This was my own fault, as I had neglected subjects that “paid” such as Mathematics, and spent a great deal of time on subjects that did not “pay” such as English

Literature. My father received the news with wonderful patience. Though he had spent a large sum of money on my cramming course, and did not know what next to do with me, all he said was "I am sorry that this time we cannot sing the song of victory."

II. CAMBRIDGE.

IN October, 1881, I went to Cambridge to a small college, which had the reputation of being evangelical, and was chosen by my father for that reason. Those were not the days of young dons, and the fellows of the college were rather of the dry-as-dust order, though probably conscientious enough. One of them was known as "Satan" from his habit of roaming about the college courts at night.

My two years and a half at a London "crammer's" had taken away from me all relish for athletic sports, and though during my first two terms at Cambridge I "tubbed," *i.e.* I went down to the river to take rowing lessons, I never arrived at proficiency in that or any other sport. I lived out of college and slowly but surely became a "smug," *i.e.* a man whose only thoughts centred on his books and himself. Although my

college contained a good proportion of Christian men, there was also a considerable rowdy element in it. During the long vacation everyone who was "up" had to reside in college, and the rowdy ones, after drinking more than was good for them, used to devote themselves to "mauling the smugs," *i.e.* going round to their rooms, making hay of the furniture and cutting off the beards of the unfortunates who had ventured to grow any. One Saturday evening they, being in a state of vinous hilarity, fell upon me in the college library and proceeded to "maul" me badly. Fortunately a don heard the noise, came in and ordered us all to our rooms. The next day I felt impelled to go and call on one of them, warning him, though not from a religious point of view, of the danger of giving way to drink. He told me to "get out," which I did; whether my mild exhortation had any effect, I cannot say. He is now vicar of a parish in the north of England.

In the autumn term of 1882 Messrs. Moody and Sankey came to Cambridge. My father was extremely anxious that I should hear them and "come out boldly for Christ," as he expressed it. Unfortunately on the very Sunday evening when Moody commenced his mission I went to a literary soiree at Mr. Oscar Browning's, of King's College. On hearing this my father wrote as follows:—

Nov. 6th, 1882. "Half-an-hour ago your letter came, and I expected to hear something of Moody's opening service. Without intending it, dear son, you have given me a dreadful blow, and I feel so sick at heart, I don't know what to do. I fully believed your Sunday evening would have been passed in the company of those who loved the Lord and were at Moody's service. Instead of this you spent the Lord's Day evening among those who do not love or serve Christ, and truly in a profane way. Not only have you lost blessing, but you have done ■

grievous injury to your own soul, grieved the Holy Spirit and injured your own conscience.

“I know how great the inducement must be for you with your literary tastes to seek the society of the men you describe, but to pass the Lord’s Day evening in such a manner surely was opposed to God’s word and will, and could not be justified. Do consider it, dearest C, as in the sight of the Lord, and then ask His forgiveness, and I entreat you never again to go on Sunday to such a soirée. My letter of yesterday will show you my mind, and oh! I beg you to listen to my warning against this insidious snare which is laid for your feet. Join yourself with those who love God and He will bless you. I cannot tell you how deeply I feel the blow, and I could not rest until I had written the warning of a loving father.”

At the time I thought my father was needlessly alarmed, but now I see he was right. Scepticism and literary

ambition had both got hold of me, and I had begun to drift away from all fixed beliefs. My best friend at Cambridge was an Irish Roman Catholic, who had been at the Oratory School at Edgbaston under Cardinal Newman. He had some of Newman's books presented to him by the Cardinal himself. These I read, felt the charm of the style, went to services in the little Roman Catholic Church, and tried praying to St. Gertrude. But this was only a temporary eddy in my steady progress towards scepticism. My Roman Catholic friend never made the least attempt to convert or pervert me. I rather fancied he was himself sceptical at bottom. He had a great admiration for Sir James Stephen's work in answer to Mill, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," which is at the antipodes to the Catholic point of view.

During the long vacation of 1883 I wrote proposing marriage to a Scotch girl with whom I had fallen in love, but she would not have anything to

say to me. My friend also left Cambridge, and I found no one to take his place, so that it was rather a melancholy year for me. In November, 1883, a well-known London evangelical conducted a mission in Great St. Mary's. He had a deep sonorous voice, and I was much impressed by his preaching. After one of his sermons I had an interview with him in the rooms of Studd, the famous cricketer. I told him I found it difficult to believe anything, and he replied "Give God the benefit of the doubt." If I had done so then, it would certainly have saved me three more years of wandering in the wilderness. Professor Drummond's book, "Natural Law in the Spiritual World," had just then come out, and was attracting much attention. My father sent me a copy, but it did not make much impression on me, the only chapter I have any distinct recollection of being that on "Degeneration." It seems a pity that Drummond never

held meetings for students in Cambridge as he did in so many other Universities.

Meanwhile the perusal of Huxley, Renan, Greg, and others had increased my tendencies to Agnosticism. In February, 1884, Leslie Stephen came to deliver the Clark lectures at Cambridge on English Literature. He was a tall, gaunt man of striking personality. When lecturing he appeared extremely nervous and his cheek would flush. He excited my interest very strongly and on looking into the matter I found that he had been a clerical fellow of Trinity Hall, but had renounced Holy Orders on finding that he could no more honestly read the Old Testament stories and the liturgy in public. I procured an early work of his, entitled, "Free Thinking and Plain Speaking," in which he sharply attacks the Broad Church party for their use of religious formulas in a non-natural sense. His arguments so wrought upon me that I began to feel it was hypocrisy to

kneel and bow one's head in the College Chapel, as one was obliged to do by the regulations five or six time a week, when one had really lost all belief in the efficacy of prayer. Accordingly I induced a friend of a similar way of thinking to call with me on the Dean of the College and to signify our intention of no longer attending the College Chapel. The Dean was more surprised than pleased. I wrote to my father also on the subject and received from him the following reply:

4th February, 1884. "Your letter has overwhelmed us with distress. I could not have believed that you would have taken such a step without first consulting us; dear son, you are deceived and have acted from impulse. It is a duty to obey the college regulations in attending chapel and you are not responsible for the irreverence of others and for anything in the service which you object to. I am grieved beyond expression at the unbelief you avow and that you have not given

weight to the moral obligation that you owe to me as your father. I have placed you at the University to take your degree and you are morally bound to do nothing against, but everything to fulfil this obligation. This change in your mind is the result of talking to others; it is an impression that will not last. The College authorities cannot alter their rules to meet your case and I beg that you will act from my judgment in the matter, and not ruin your prospects and break our hearts. Let me caution you against these talks with so-called friends that lead to such fearful mischief."

The College authorities, however, were reasonable, and seeing that my mind was really made up not to pretend to take part in a service I could not honestly join in, allowed me to declare myself no longer a member of the Church of England and to stay away. My lodgings happened to be immediately next Emmanuel Congregational Church, and I have often since

wished that I had entered it, which I never did. There I would have been more likely to hear something suited to my case than in the stereotyped college sermon. For instance, on referring to the "Cambridge Review" of that date, I find that on one occasion Dr. Horton, of Hampstead, preached in Emmanuel Church while I was only a few yards away in my rooms. In after years I have owed much to his sermons, and my debt might have been greater had I been aware of his presence then.

Shortly before I took my degree I attended a meeting in aid of the then newly-founded University Settlement in East London. Professor Westcott and Professor James Stuart were among the speakers, and the latter quoted two verses from Isaiah, which is my only distinct recollection of the meeting, "If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon-day: and the Lord shall guide

thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought. . . and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters fail not." *Isaiah lviii., 10-11.* The verses struck me even then, but I was too dull to see that they contained the secret of my unhappiness during my University course, *i.e.* that I had lived simply to myself, merely accumulating knowledge till I suffered from mental dyspepsia. Another "open secret" which the verses contained was, that the way to light was not through philosophical speculation, but through beneficent *action*. It took me three years more blundering and stumbling before I made this double discovery.

In June, 1884, I took my degree. The result of my University course was that I had made shipwreck of my faith and began professional life without any spiritual guidance.

III. SCHOLASTIC WORK.

I SPENT most of the Long Vacation of 1884 lying about in the back garden and reading novels. What to do for my future career I knew not, and entered the path of least resistance, *i.e.* scholastic work. It is curious to consider that though teachers in secondary schools must have teachers' certificates, a University man with a degree may set to work to teach at once without special training. My first offer of a post was from a clergyman who kept a cramming establishment in the country. I went down and stayed with him for a night by way of seeing the place. He noticed that at prayers I was quite silent during the recital of the creed. I told him my agnostic views, and the result was that our negotiations fell through.

I had recourse to the scholastic agents. It was not a very exhilarating

experience to sit in an agent's office with other candidates, while we were called in one by one to interview some headmaster. After applying for nearly twenty places I obtained one as assistant master in a high school in the west of England. The headmaster was a gentleman, and though the work was hard (I remember sitting up the whole of one night looking over examination papers) it was not disagreeable. But I was not a good disciplinarian; the boys did not like me. I felt for them something of the aversion I have always felt for boys since my public school days.

At this place I fell in love with a girl—this time with a dark-eyed one. But my suit did not prosper. When in love I always adored the objects of my devotion, and was very nervous in their presence. Girls probably prefer the (outwardly at any rate) calm and callous men. One Sunday evening walking round a square I proposed to her and she refused me.

Evidently I was not destined to be fortunate in love.

All this time the relations between my father and myself continued cordial, though he was a fervent Christian and I believed nothing. He was fond of open-air preaching, and in the vacations I used to assist him by singing hymns, though I fear this was not very honest, as to me they were meaningless. I was fond of dancing and theatres, but in order not to annoy him used only to go to matinées. About this time I find in a small pocket-diary the word "Christ" with a note of interrogation appended, which seems to show that I now and then looked wistfully towards Christianity though I had no definite beliefs. My father saw that it was no use arguing with me, though now and then in his letters a sentence like a sigh escaped him, "His name to me is as ointment poured forth; it was so once to you."

Being, I suppose, unsatisfied with my work, the headmaster gave me

notice to quit in the summer of 1885, and the next term I undertook a lectureship at an Army "crammer's" not far from London. Here the pupils were big fellows from the public schools only a few years younger than myself, and the lectures often ended in a rough-and-tumble scuffle. Here therefore I only remained one term and the next obtained a private tutorship again in the west of England. This was my happiest experience in the scholastic line. My employer's wife had, as she told me afterwards, heard of my sceptical views, and prayed that I might not come. But after I had come she proved herself a true friend. "I knew," she wrote some years afterwards, "that you were restless, and I longed that you might know what is now your greatest happiness." Her husband himself was a sceptic and told me on one occasion that he considered the words, "Come unto me, etc.," an interpolation.

Very likely it was due to this lady's prayers that while in this place, after

some years of spiritual anaesthesia, I received distinct religious impressions again. One grey Sunday morning in February, 1886, while sitting in church and feeling dreary enough, a sort of glory rose upon my spirit and I felt there was something higher and nobler to live for than had ever yet dawned upon my mind. When I got to my room, for the first time after the lapse of years, I really prayed, though without any definite idea to whom I was praying. It was one of what Wordsworth calls those

Re-bounds our inward ear
Sometimes catches from afar;
Ponder, listen, hold them dear,
For of God, of God they are.

It was as if a rift in the clouds had opened and shown the gleaming mountain tops in the distance, but the glimpse soon vanished. To drop metaphor, I was at that time too fond of metaphysical speculation to obey the simple intuitions of faith and to believe in God without formal

proof. I read theologians like Maurice and Liddon, and philosopher's like Martineau, but they left me very much as they found me. When sensual passion rose, like the "bore" in some rivers, theories about God were of no more avail to check it than a straw. At such times the intellect is a traitor, and takes advantage of any irrelevant scepticism to let passion have its way.

About this time (June, 1886) a friend of mine in the Burmah Civil Service was killed while trying to capture a stronghold of dacoits. Two years previously he had invited me to dine with him at his club in London, and he seemed quite an ordinary man of the world. But as I subsequently discovered from a mutual friend, he was passing through a religious crisis and came back to God after nine years' backsliding. In December, 1884, he wrote to this friend, the Christian lecturer at the "crammer's" mentioned in the first chapter, as follows: "I may tell you at the outset that I had

gone back from God and left the Christians' path for several years. Since my return home, God has in His mercy brought me back. Many moments of bitter shame, remorse and humiliation I have had at the way in which I have dishonoured Him. His grace has been greater than my sins, and He has again sent His blessed Spirit as a token of forgiveness and restoration. The remembrance of years wasted is awful, but I am thankful to say He has stirred me up more than ever to devote the rest of my life to Christ wherever I may be." Eighteen months after writing this letter he was killed by dacoits. There was an ugly rumour that he was also crucified, which I hope is not true. His death did not make much impression on me at the time. At the end of July, 1886, I resigned my tutorship and went to London, where I read at a "crammer's" for a term with a view to competing for the First Class, Home Civil Service. One of the lecturers at this

God
(return
to)

"crammer's" was the late John Churton Collins, and I had occasion to admire his wonderful memory for quotations. In the competitive examination I was 17th out of 89 candidates, but obtained no post, there being fewer vacancies that year than usual.

At the end of 1886 I fell as an "ordinary secret sinner," as Robert Louis Stevenson expresses it. My remorse was great, and found vent in the following verses:

Mors Triplex.

What of the golden hope
Of the days of long ago?
In the dark I bleed and grope,
And stagger to and fro.
The flesh is proud and strong,
And the spirit numbed and weak;
How long, O death, how long,
Art thou coming, whom I seek?

What of the star-eyed faith
Which once illumed my way?
Now but a cloudy wraith,
It sends no answering ray.
I call to the empty void,
Vain echoes mock the call,
For the soul with sin that toyed,
Is now sin's abject thrall.

What of the soaring love
Which might have scaled the skies?
Long time with scorn it strove,
But now exhausted, dies.
And youth, which once adored
With ardent eyes of prayer,
Bears now a forehead scored
By deep lines of despair.

Such was the effect of what a man
of the world would regard as a mere
peccadillo on a conscience rendered
sensitive by ancestry and upbringing.
By way of soothing my conscience
I sent a subscription to a female
reformatory, but did not find the
method very efficacious.

IV. CONVERSION.

IN February, 1887, failing to obtain any educational post, I went to Oxford to read for a scholarship open without limit of age. I was fond of the classics, especially Plato and the Greek dramatists, but they contained no balm for a wounded conscience. I was extremely lonely at Oxford, being older than most undergraduates and knowing very few. At that time Bishop Boyd Carpenter was preaching his eloquent Bampton lectures on the "Permanent Elements of Religion" in St. Mary's Church, which was always crowded to hear them. He also spoke one Sunday evening in New College Hall on the subject of purity, describing the man of immoral life as always having a shadow behind him. It was all very true and eloquently put, but I do not remember being really

touched by it. About this time I read in Martineau's "Endeavours after a Christian Life" the following passage in the chapter entitled "Christ's treatment of guilt," which I here transcribe, as I shall hereafter have occasion to allude to it in connection with a startling "coincidence."

"There are cases in which some particular function of the memory acquires an exquisite sensibility, and usually, as if God would warn us what must happen when our moral nature is divorced from the physical, it is the memory of conscience that maintains the preternatural watch. In many a hospital of mental disease (as it is called) you have doubtless seen a melancholy being pacing to and fro with rapid strides and lost to everything around, wringing his hands in incommunicable suffering, and letting fall a low mutter, rising quickly into the shrill cry; his features cut with the graver of sharp remorse; his eyelids drooping (for he never sleeps) and

— showering ever-scalding tears. It is the maniac of remorse; possibly indeed made wretched by merely imaginary crimes, but just as possibly maddened by too true a recollection, and what the world would esteem too scrupulous a conscience.

“Listen to him and you will often be surprised into fresh pity to find how seemingly slight are the offences—injuries perhaps of mere unripened thought which feed the fires and whirl the lash of this incessant woe. He is the dread type of hell. He is absolutely sequestered (as any mind may be hereafter), incarcerated alone with his memories of sin, and that is all. He is unconscious of objects and unaware of time; and every guilty soul may find itself likewise, standing alone in a theatre peopled with the collected images of the ills that he has done, and, turn where he may, the features he has made sad with grief, the eyes he has lighted with passion, the infant faces he has suffused with needless

tears, stare upon him with insufferable fixedness. And if thus the Past be truly indestructible; if thus its fragments may be re-gathered; if its details of evil thought and act may be thus brought together and fused into one big agony—why, it may be left to fools to make a mock at sin.”

Calvinistic preachers have often been blamed for drawing terrific pictures of hell, but it is doubtful whether any of them in their most lurid efforts ever equalled in poignancy and probability this forecast of the Unitarian philosopher.

Scared as my conscience already was, the above passage made an indelible impression upon it. Just then in connection with the scholarship I had won, I was asked to furnish a testimonial as to my moral character. After the grave sins of which I had been guilty, I felt I could not honestly do this; so I wrote a letter resigning the scholarship and stating the reason. The letter, however, was never sent, as

a friend of mine, a hard-headed Agnostic, laughed away my scruples. It was merely a postponement of the exposure of a moral sore. This Agnostic at the same time informed me that at the college where I had won the scholarship there was a "Society for the Propagation of Immorality." Whether this was a fact or not I never discovered, as I never actually entered the college, but the mere title affords a striking illustration of the text, "Fools make a mock at sin."

The summer term of 1887 now commenced, and for the most part of it I was precisely in the state described by Professor William James in the chapter entitled "The Sick Soul" of his book, "The Varieties of Religious Experience." My conscience was sore, and even apparent trifles seemed to chafe it. I had the privilege of the acquaintance of Mr. F. C. S. Schiller, then, as now, a philosopher, but what could his or any other philosophy do in the way of healing? I heard Brandram recite

"Macbeth" in the Sheldonian Theatre on May 6th, 1887, and Lady Macbeth's awful cry "Out! damned spot," woke an echo in my conscience. One day in a friend's room I took up George Herbert's poems, in which the following lines met my eye,

"If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to My breast,"

and I was very weary.

On May 11th I was asked to speak on Dante Rossetti at the "Pelicans," a literary society of Corpus Christi College, to which my Agnostic friend belonged. Another prominent member of the society, Mr. Arthur Sidgwick, was also an Agnostic. In my speech I quoted Rossetti's lines:

"I do not see them here; but after death,
God knows I know the faces I shall see,
Each one a murdered self; with low last breath
'I am thyself' lo! each one saith to me,
'And I and I, thyself' lo! each one saith,
'And thou thyself to all eternity.'"

Poor Rossetti knew the burden of a guilty conscience, and his brother records that on his death-bed he

begged for a priest to whom he might confess. In the above lines he expresses that sense of the awfulness of unending individuality which all deep souls feel. Even the pantheist Whitman exclaims,

“Ye are not thrown to the winds; you gather
certainly round yourself,
Yourself! Yourself! Yourself! for ever and ever!”

The summer loveliness of Oxford only seems to accentuate the hollowness of life as I found it then. Something was always fretting the sore spot in my conscience. In vain I attended concerts and theatres. I felt like an insect which has come to the edge of a stone, waves its feelers in the air, and does not know what to lay hold of. Everything turned vapid; even music lost its charm.

On May 21st, as I came back from watching the “Eights,” I noticed that two undergraduates had posted themselves at a narrow gate near Merton College, through which most of the men returning from the races passed.

They were distributing tracts, and the title of one by Spurgeon, "He was drowned, and I was saved," caught my eye. Up to that time, like most people, I had been apt to despise tracts and tract distributors, but I could not help admiring the pluck shown by these two men.

On Sunday, May 22nd, Mr. (now Bishop) Welldon preached the University sermon. In it he spoke of "the sin which is slaying its thousands in the streets of London." That sentence, backed by the moral earnestness of the preacher, went home.

On May 24th I attended a performance of the *Alcestis*. In the light of what happened shortly afterwards, the final chorus seems fraught with significance,

πολλοὶ μορφοὶ τῶν δαιμονίων

Manifold are thy shapings, Providence
Many a hopeless matter Gods arrange.
What we expected never came to pass
What we did not expect Gods brought to bear,
So have things gone this whole experience
through."

Within a fortnight of hearing these words, the greatest experience of my life had befallen me,—I had been “born again.” I am not afraid of using the trite phrase, for experience has verified it. Another fall,—and a little before midnight on June 4th, 1887, I found myself in a network of narrow streets behind Pembroke College. Though the moon was at the full, I lost my way and found myself in a *cul-de-sac*. Suddenly the heavy strokes of midnight boomed through the air from the “Tom Tower” of Christ Church. As each successive stroke vibrated, I was seized with something like panic, so glaring was the contrast between Oxford “spreading her gardens to the moonlight” and the wretched profligate who had been hunted, as it were, into a blind alley. I hurried to my rooms and flung myself upon the bed.

The next morning was Trinity Sunday, June 5th. The grey towers and green gardens were beautiful in the sunshine, but to me, as Browning says,

it was "night with a sun added." In New College Chapel not far away, they were singing Heber's hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty." I sat in my rooms, trying to drowse conscience by reading the "Agamemnon," but the furies were awake and muttering. Afterwards I went to the Union and wrote a letter home, in which occurred the words "Yesterday and to-day the weather is beautiful but I am sick and sad." I took up George Meredith's "Ordeal of Richard Feverel," but it did not lighten the burden. About 9 p.m. I found myself sitting alone in my room, while the June twilight deepened over the Sheldonian Theatre opposite. At last pride and unbelief gave way and I prayed,—I hardly knew to Whom—but I prayed.

The next morning as I sat smoking, I suddenly broke my pipe in two and flung it across the room. It seemed a contemptible self-indulgence. In the evening I opened my Bible, which I had never seriously read since my

boyhood. The next week I received news of the death of a relative, and in announcing it my father used these words: "Everything was bright and promised well, but the darkness came, and self-indulgence, and because God was left out, the end has been misery." No words could have more precisely described my own case. But a change had taken place within, the full significance of which I did not see till afterwards. I felt, however, that I should try and find work among the poor, and wrote to a leading London Vicar with that object. He replied, "Is thy heart right as my heart is with thy heart? if it be, give me thine hand."

On my last Sunday evening in Oxford, I passed a street preacher near St. Clement's. Very few people were near him, and he was delivering a not very lively discourse on the Prodigal Son. The old story, so familiar from childhood, was now fraught with immense significance for me. Years afterwards

I endeavoured to fix the impression of that evening in verse:

THE STREET PREACHER.

No crowd encircled him about,
He stood despised with two or three ;
But, like a spring in summer drought,
The word he uttered, quickened me.

Around us Oxford, dome and tower,
Majestic breathed her charm august,
But which of all her spells had power
To raise the wretched from the dust ?

What Oxford could not, Jesus did ;
Bared to my eyes the depths of grace,
And all the unguessed treasures hid
Beneath the dust of common-place.

Since then I tread the pilgrims' way,
Still plodding on through sun and rain,
But like a star, shines out that day,
The day which saw me born again.

At the beginning of July, 1887, I commenced work in the parish of the London vicar above-mentioned. I had not been there long when it occurred to me to go and tell one of my friends, an Oxford man, of the change which had taken place in me. He seemed impressed and asked me to go with him to see his father, a clergyman who had

lost his reason and was in a private asylum. We went together and in this unfortunate man I found the exact embodiment of Martineau's weird description of the maniac of remorse. The man's mind, and it was of a superior order (he had been at Balliol), had become a veritable cesspool from which exhaled foul imaginations. Never shall I forget the green light in his eyes as he glared at me and said, "I am a lost soul!" He would talk quite rationally and consecutively for a time and then burst into a hideous whimpering. He told me that he had been in the habit of neglecting his clerical duties and amusing himself with obscene pictures. He was indeed, as Martineau said, "the dread type of hell," and to see him was to recall Dante's lines,

"So low he fell, that all appliances
For his salvation were already short,
Save showing him the people of perdition."

I told him something of my own slips in the mire, and he was peremptory on

the need of confession. "If you had a thorn in your hand, would you not show it to some-one?" he said. I returned to my rooms, feeling as though I really had had a glimpse into hell, and that God is not the amiable imbecile He is so often represented to be in our modern emasculated theology. That evening at the usual week-night service, by a strange coincidence, the vicar preached on confession from the 32nd Psalm, "While I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me : my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I said, I will confess my sin unto the Lord, and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."

After the service I told the vicar my trouble, and two days afterwards my father, who was extremely sympathetic. At the time of my conversion at Oxford, I had no intention of confessing, but this interview with the maniac clergyman, quite unsought by me, drove me

to it. Evangelicals as a rule, rather deprecate confession to any human being, but I must confess I found it very salutary.

This vacation was the happiest I had ever spent. Naturally one felt very awkward when paying one's first visits among the poor, speaking in the open air, etc. But the sense of Christian fellowship was quite new to me; I was diverted from eternally brooding over myself and the insoluble enigmas of life, into work for others, and verified the truth of the verse of Isaiah, which I had heard quoted by Professor Stuart at Cambridge three years previously, and which I might have verified then, had I not been blind. "If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light rise in darkness and thy obscurity be as the noonday, and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought."



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